

Testimony by Debra Miller Sarazin, President of
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Submitted Testimony to the Labor and Public Employees Committee February 24, 2015
HB 6246 An Act Concerning Labor Agreements and the Governing Bodies of Municipalities

My name is Debra Miller Sarazin and I am the president of Sarazin General Contractors, Inc. We have been in business since 1991 and we are a small woman owned business enterprise as recognized by the State of Connecticut and the Federal Government. Our company focuses primarily of state, federal and municipal projects. We have worked on hundreds of projects for the state and various towns and cities throughout Connecticut.

I voice my support for HB 6246, An Act Concerning Labor Agreements and the Governing Bodies of Municipalities. With so much at stake on large municipal construction projects, it is worth the time to host a public hearing to decide whether or not to use a Project Labor Agreement (PLA). The past few years have been devastating economically to our entire state. While recovery is slowly working its way to Connecticut, we are all still faced with many challenges. During such challenging times, there is often misinformation communicated in an effort to obtain jobs. If there is pressure to vote for a union-only project labor agreement (PLA) we hope that state and municipalities will consider the facts prior to deliberating the best course of action for a construction project. The best way to insure that complete information is provided is to require a public hearing.

It is my belief that PLAs are contracts that discriminate against non-union contractors by using specific and unique clauses that are not found on most construction projects. There have been many spirited debates regarding the use of PLAs on public construction jobs including discussions on cost increases, project delays, and the overall quality of the work.

One issue that I find most upsetting is how this impacts the worker. The fact is PLAs are designed to ensure that all of the work on the job is performed by union labor. PLA proponents will cite examples where non-union contractors successfully bid on jobs. These examples however are rare exceptions to the indisputable fact that non-union contractors simply DO NOT bid on PLAs. This means that their workforce is denied the opportunity to work on these projects. Why don't non-union companies bid on PLA's? Typical PLAs are pre-hire contracts that require projects be awarded only to contractors and subcontractors that agree to:

- recognize unions as the representatives of their employees on that job
- use the union hiring hall to obtain workers
- obtain apprentices exclusively from union apprenticeship programs, and
- pay into union benefit plans

My company cannot/will not bid on projects that prevent us from using our employees and prevent us from being competitive due to duplication of benefits (we provide benefits such as health insurance, dental insurance, long and short term disability, life insurance, pension funds, vacations and holidays and a PLA would require us to ALSO pay into the union funds-regardless of the fact that our employees are already covered by these benefits)

In Connecticut, less than 20% of the construction workforce is union. This means that 80% of construction workers in Connecticut would not be able to work on a job if it was a PLA. It is simply not fair to eliminate over 80% of construction workers from having the opportunity to make a living and provide for their family.

PLA mandates are also particularly harmful towards minority and women owned businesses and their employees. MBE and WBE workers have traditionally been under-represented in unions, and will be further prevented from being given the chance to work and earn a living on a project that uses a PLA.

Finally, PLAs discriminate against local workers who are not part of a union. PLAs claim to help local workers, but they fail to mention that the local workers they reference still have to be part of a union. If you are a "local worker" but work for a non-union contractor, you still will not be able to work on the project. It is a grave injustice that a resident construction worker, would not have the opportunity to work on a project that his or her tax dollars are going to fund.

I would like to see all Connecticut projects built successfully, on time, under budget and using a fair and open bidding process where both union and non-union contractors can compete. In the end, government-mandated PLAs prevent taxpayers from getting the best possible product at the best possible price.

In conclusion, I am supportive of HB 6246. I urge the committee to support this bill, and make sure that the proposed use of a PLA receives a public hearing before being signed.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Debra Miller Sarazin", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Debra Miller Sarazin
President